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Designing networked learning for innovation in teacher learning groups

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General abstract (max. 200 words)

Describe your practitioner research: what are the central research questions, the methodology used, the research results and main conclusions for educational practice?

This study searches for guidelines to facilitate teacher-learning groups (TLGs) that aim to create sustainable knowledge (i.e., knowledge-creating TLGs). The 'Dimensions of Social Learning (DSL) Framework' is applied as a starting point to analyse the groups' social configuration. The study explores the integration of two theories (social capital and value creation) into the DSL Framework in order to broaden the sustainable knowledge-creation perspective. To test the usability of the extended framework we conducted a case study in a primary teacher training college in the Netherlands. We found that both theories added features of knowledge creation to the DSL Framework: social capital in a process-oriented manner and value creation in a product-oriented way. For the facilitation of knowledge-creating TLGs, the collective knowledge working identity is an important indicator. A gradual development of both spread leadership and an inquiry-based attitude are important for this indicator. Institutional value creation is a second indicator. This indicator says that TLGs should involve all stakeholders when starting a joint enterprise and connect actions to institutional goals right from the start.

Detailed abstract

Which theoretical background and/or earlier research results is the practice-based research based on? (max. 150 words)

In contemporary education we expect teachers to anticipate educational change, preferably with colleagues (Hargreaves et al., 2013). Teaching institutes regard teacher-learning groups (TLGs) as panacea for facing change and solving problems that are too complex to solve individually. Vrieling, Van den Beemt, and De Laat (2016) developed

the 'Dimensions of Social Learning (DSL) Framework' to facilitate TLGs in assessing their potential social value as a guideline for professional development. With this framework, TLGs can analyse their social configuration in relation to the group's learning goals. The DSL Framework distinguishes four dimensions: (1) practice, (2) domain and value creation, (3) collective identity, and (4) organization. The indicators corresponding to these dimensions can bring the social configuration of TLGs into view. Earlier findings (De Laat, Vrieling, & Van den Beemt, 2016) show that the framework suits the analysis of TLGs' social configurations.

What are the research questions in this practice-based research? (max. 150 words)

TLGs are necessary to develop products. Committees monitor TLGs to value the quality of these products by means of criteria (Ehlen, 2014). Besides the control for quality, organisations also aim for TLGs to develop a long-term perspective with a focus on continuous and sustainable development and innovation, integrated into and relevant to the organization of which the groups are part (i.e., knowledge-creating TLGs). Although the DSL Framework generally suits the analysis of TLGs' social configuration, the sustainable knowledge creation of TLGs is only viewed in the extent to which group members perceive each other as 'task executors or knowledge workers' (being part of the 'collective identity' dimension). Therefore, this study explores in what way the integration of the social capital theory (Ehlen, 2014) as well as the value creation theory (Wenger, Trayner, & De Laat, 2011) broadens the knowledge-creation perspective of TLGs.

Which research design, instruments and methods for data analysis are used in the research as presented? (max. 150 words)

First, we extended the DSL Framework with additional knowledge-creating perspectives derived from two theories. Subsequently, we tested the usability of the extended framework by means of a case study. We studied a TLG case that included six primary teacher educators. This group's objective was to develop a new educational curriculum. We audio-recorded and transcribed seven group meetings. In addition, individual interviews were taken between group meetings and after the final meeting. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. We used the extended DSL Framework as coding scheme to analyse the data. To enhance the internal validity of the results two independent researchers first qualitatively analysed the data into a content analytic summary matrix (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Second, both researchers reciprocally checked the matrix and discussed similarities and differences in their analyses. This process resulted in a matrix containing the final data for analysis as well as codes and themes.

What are the research results? (max. 150 words)

Two indicators of the DSL Framework were important for knowledge-creating TLGs: (1) collective knowledge working identity and (2) institutional value creation. Collective knowledge working identity develops when TLGs aim for shared knowledge through the use of a shared agenda. In such TLGs, distributed leadership is an attractive concept for professional development. A second condition is the development of an inquiry-based attitude. Both the internal and external dimensions of an inquiry-based attitude (Meijer, Kuijpers, Boei, & Vrieling, 2016) were proven important. For the internal dimension, a reflective learning environment is required where providing feedback and asking positively formulated critical questions is a regular behaviour. Regarding the external dimension, knowledge sourcing appeared important. The second indicator for knowledge-creating TLGs concerns institutional value creation. It stresses the importance for TLGs to interact with stakeholders and connect with the institutional goals from the start to ensure embeddedness and change on the organisational level.

What are the main conclusions and/or interpretations drawn in this practice-based research? (max. 150 words)

We found that both the social capital theory of Wenger et al. and the value creation theory of Ehlen enriched our dimension theory: social capital in a process-oriented, conditional manner and value creation in a product-oriented sense. The findings show that the extended DSL Framework helps to reveal knowledge productivity of TLGs by means of the identification of conducive and obstructing factors. As such, the framework can function as instrument for professional development of knowledge-creating TLGs.

How does the research support the current field of practice-based educational research and/or how does it improve (future) educational practice? (max. 150 words)

There is increasing attention for social learning in TLGs as a stimulus for the professional development of teachers. The results of the present study can be used to inform TLGs (e.g., networks, learning communities, or teams) about the DSL Framework and its use to facilitate professional development within their groups. Moreover, it can provide information for teacher leaders to select and build professional learning trajectories for individual teachers.

How will you ensure interactivity in your presentation? Which questions or statements will you present to the session participants for discussion? (max. 150 words)

After a brief presentation of the case study, there will be time for the session participants to ask (clarifying) questions. Subsequently, the participants will have the opportunity to fill in (parts of) the DSL Framework. Based on this experience the presenter will start a group discussion on the practical use of the DSL Framework. This will last the remainder of the session.

References

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